

2000-2001 WINTER BIRD SURVEY

By Jeb Williams

The Game and Fish Department's winter bird survey marked its sixth year in 2000-01. Approximately 350 North Dakota citizens participate in this popular event.

Backyard bird feeding is a satisfying winter hobby for many who like to see concentrations of birds, but who may not know just what species they are feeding. The backyard survey encourages citizens to do their best to correctly identify birds that visit their feeders, adding to their knowledge and appreciation for the variety of songbirds in our state's back yards.

The survey helps the Department's Watchable Wildlife program and interested bird watchers determine overall wintering bird population trends.

Songbirds are a valuable part of the environment, and while they are not harvested for meat and recreational enjoyment, their importance is often overlooked. The backyard survey provides the Department with valuable data and information to share with interested individuals.

Surveys also provide information that is useful in tracking winter bird numbers from year to year and determining long-term population trends. The Department can use this information to partner with various agencies or non-government organizations to research species of concern.

In the future, the Game and Fish Department will continue nongame research. Funding for nongame species research does not come easy; Game and Fish is funded directly by sportsmen, therefore the priorities are on game species. The only direct funding source dedicated to non-consumptive uses in North Dakota is the Nongame and Watchable Wildlife check-off on the state tax form. Non-consumptive users (bird watchers, hikers, photographers, wildlife viewers, etc.) need to support future



Harold Umber

Red polls are beautiful little birds that sometimes show up at bird feeders in great numbers during North Dakota's harsh winters.

funding initiatives and relay that support to our congressional delegation.

Last year, we reported that the legislation known as the Conservation and Reinvestment Act (CARA), was being voted on in the Senate. This bill was changed dramatically from the original draft but still provided North Dakota with

helpful funding for species in need of research. Another form of CARA is again headed to the Senate, an indication that non-consumptive wildlife users are increasingly seeking additional funding to increase nongame research.

AVERAGE SPECIES PER FEEDER (BY REGION)

DECEMBER 2001
JANUARY 2001
FEBRUARY 2001

2000-01 RESULTS

The exotic house sparrow once again dominates the winter bird survey. These aggressive sparrows compete, destroy, and kill during the nesting and hatching season for songbirds.

Many bird enthusiasts put up wren houses in their back yard only to have sparrows take over. To discourage sparrows from using wren houses, the diameter of the entrance must be cut small enough to ensure only the wren will be able to nest in the artificial box.

Sparrows can also take over bluebird boxes. Bluebird boxes need to be monitored to ensure they do not provide additional nesting habitat for house sparrows.

In winter, refrain from feeding bread scraps and the department store "basic mix" birdseed composed mostly of millet, cracked corn, and canary seed, all of which are appealing to sparrows. Black oil sunflower is by far the best seed to offer considering price and attractiveness to a variety of birds.

Besides the house sparrow, black-capped chickadees were abundant in all regions, but were especially high in the northeast with a total of 874 in December, 601 in January, and 681 in February. The pine siskin was abundant in the northeast as well, 1,394 and 1,385 in January and February, actually outnumbering house sparrows.

Many North Dakotans have figured out that birding is passion once you get started. Whether it is our bluebird program, winter bird survey, field trips, or general birding programs, public participation indicates a growing demand for nongame and watchable wildlife activities.

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